

Merritt Reservoir

2010 Creel Survey Summary



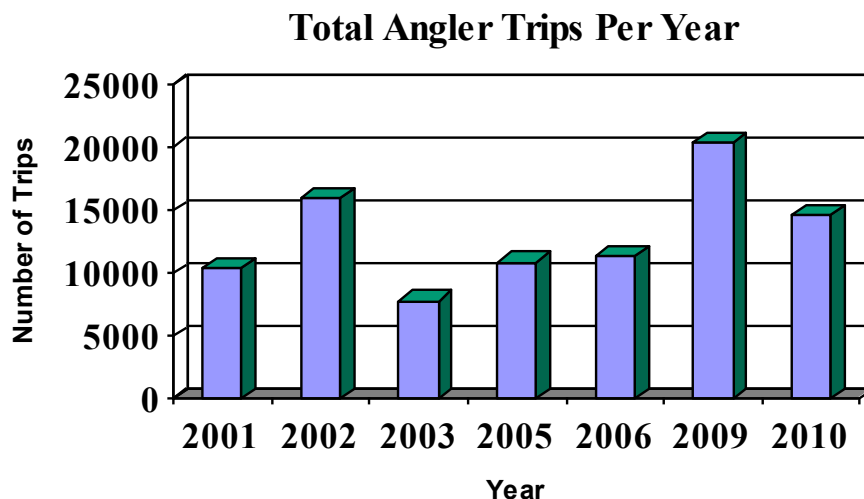
Zac Brashears Fisheries Biologist

A five year angler or creel survey is being conducted at Merritt Reservoir. The study is being done through an agreement between the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. This survey will be run from April 1 until October 31 for the years 2009-2013. During this time, anglers are counted and interviewed on twenty randomly selected days per month; fourteen week days and six weekend days. Information gathered from these surveys allows fisheries managers to look at estimates of angling pressure, size structure of fish caught, catch and harvest, and catch rates. This information also allows managers to evaluate fishing regulations.

The following text and graphs provide a summary of the creel survey data for 2010 with comparisons to the 2001-2003, 2005-2006, and 2009 surveys.

Angler Trips

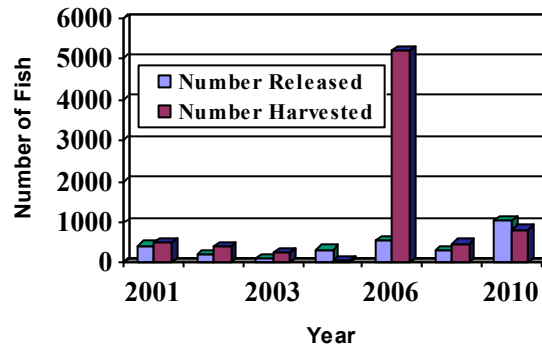
There was a slight decline in the number of angler trips made to Merritt Reservoir during 2010, however the estimated 14,538 angler trips was still above the average of 13,000 angler trips since 2001. Anglers in 2010 spent an estimated 88,751 hours fishing with an average of 6.10 hours per trip. Seventy percent of the trips were made seeking walleye, fifteen percent seeking anything anglers could catch and the other 15 percent spent seeking channel catfish, northern pike, muskellunge, largemouth bass, yellow perch, black crappie, and common carp. Anglers from 10 states (8.25% of the fisherman) and 78 Nebraska counties fished Merritt Reservoir during the survey period.



Channel Catfish

There was a slight increase in the number of channel catfish caught in 2010. With the exception of 2006 the number of harvested catfish has been steady since 2001. Total catch in 2010 consisted of 1852 fish of which 825 fish were harvested and 1,027 fish released. The average length of fish harvested was 26.3 inches compared to the 2001-2009 average of 23.4 inches. The catch rate for anglers seeking catfish was 0.26 fish per hour and the harvest rate was 0.09 fish per hour.

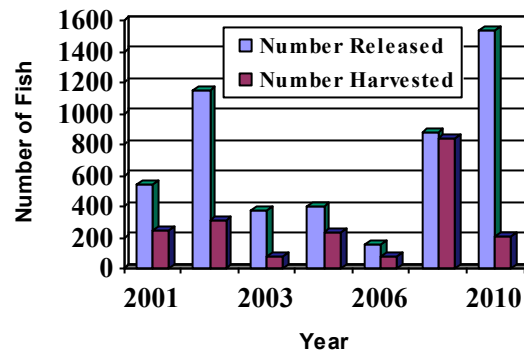
Channel Catfish Caught Per Year



Northern Pike

The number of northern pike caught was nearly the same as 2009 with an estimated 1,742 fish caught. Although the estimated total catch was nearly identical, harvest numbers were less and similar to the 2001-2006 average. Of those 1,742 fish caught, 1,532 fish were released and 210 were harvested. The average length of pike harvested was 25.4 inches compared to the 2001-2009 average of 26.1 inches. The catch rates for anglers seeking northern pike was 0.12 fish per hour while harvest rates were 0.02 fish per hour.

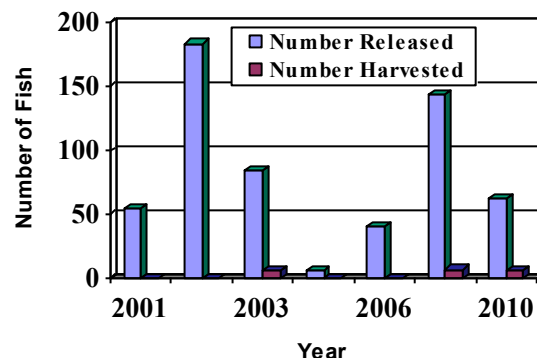
Northern Pike Caught Per Year



Muskellunge

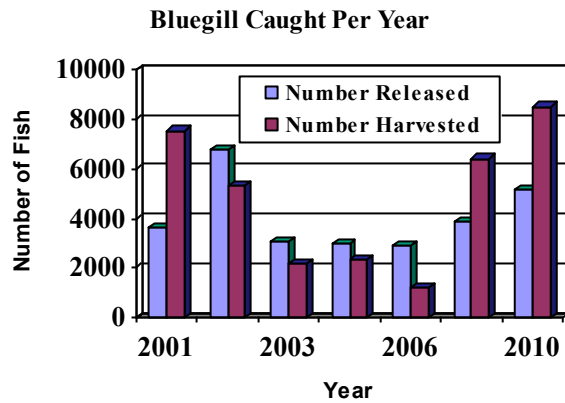
The muskellunge catch rates for 2010 were approximately half of what they were in 2009 with an estimated 69 fish caught. Of those fish caught, 95% were released and 88% of those fish were less than the 40-inch minimum length limit and could not be legally harvested. Total numbers of muskellunge harvested was 6 fish with an average length of 44 inches compared to the 2009 average of 42.9 inches. The largest muskellunge observed during the creel survey period was 45 inches.

Muskellunge Caught Per Year



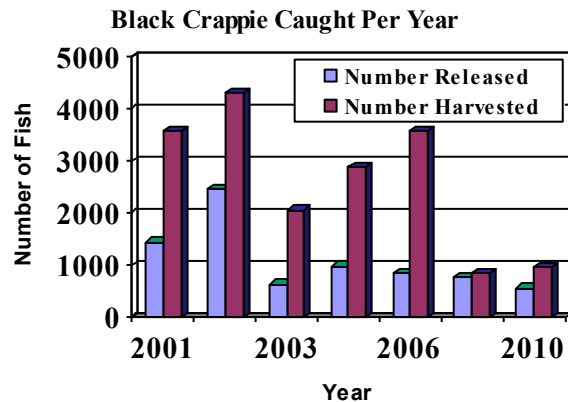
Bluegill

The bluegill catch in 2010 was the highest recorded since 2001 with an estimated 13,685 fish caught. Harvested bluegill continued to increase in 2010 with an estimated 8,513 fish harvested. Bluegill that were harvested averaged 7.3 inches which is identical to the 2001-2009 average. The catch rates for anglers seeking bluegill was 2.6 fish per hour and harvest rates were 1.78 fish per hour.



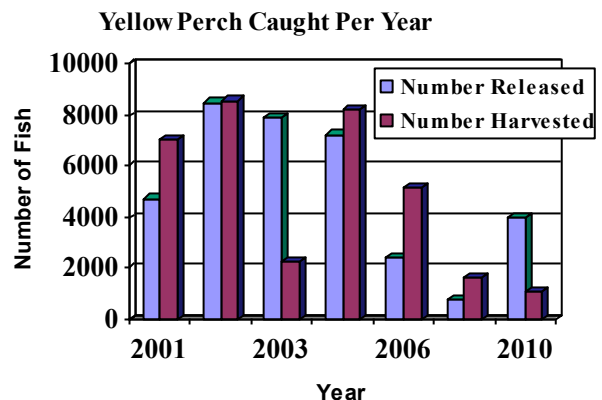
Black Crappie

Crappie catch continued to be lower in 2010 than the 2001-2006 surveys. Total catch was 1,525 crappie, of which 971 were harvested and 554 were released. The average fish harvested was approximately 10.8 inches compared to the 2001-2009 average of 10.1 inches. Catch rates for anglers seeking crappie was 0.32 fish per hour and harvest rates were 0.23 fish per hour.



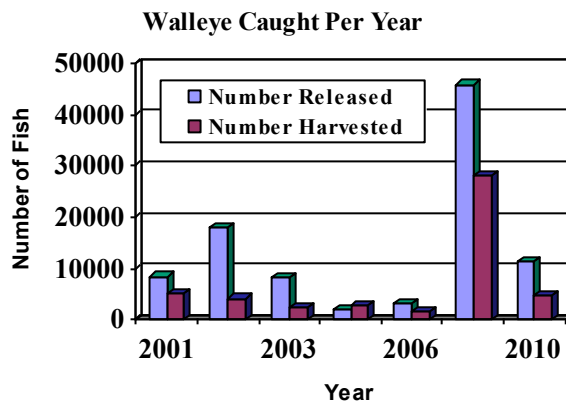
Yellow perch

Yellow perch harvest continued a declining trend in 2010, but there was some increase in the number of fish released. A total of 5,076 yellow perch were caught and of those fish 1,076 were harvested and 4,000 fish were released. The average harvested perch was 9 inches and slightly larger than the 2001-2009 average of 8.9 inches. Anglers seeking yellow perch caught 0.44 fish per hour and harvested .013 fish per hour.



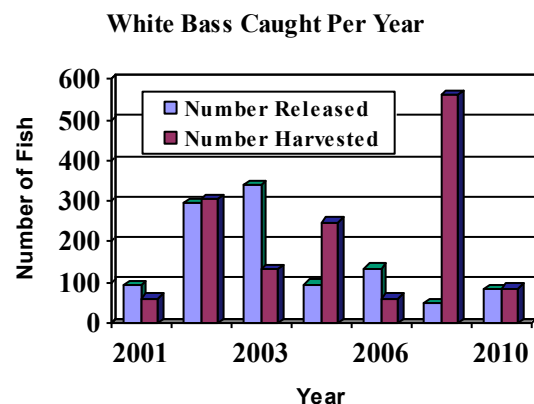
Walleye

Walleye catch at Merritt Reservoir declined drastically from the 2009 survey with an estimated total catch of 16,280 fish. The total catch is still above average when compared to the 2001-2006 surveys. Of the total catch, 4,776 fish were harvested and 11,504 were released. The decrease in catch is due, at least in part, to the estimated 28,231 fish that were harvested from Merritt during the 2009 survey period. In 2010 the average walleye harvested was 17.9 inches. Angler seeking walleye caught an estimated 0.23 fish per hour and harvested 0.06 fish per hour.



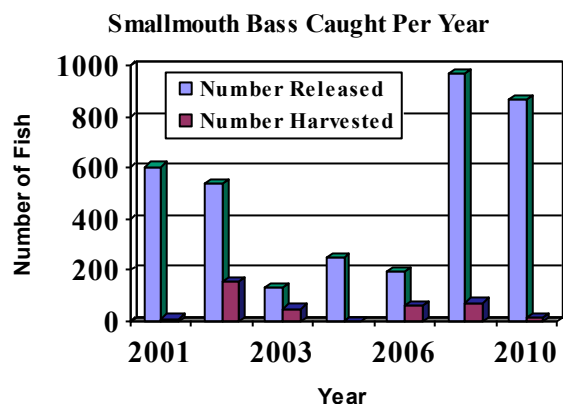
White Bass

White bass catch remains low at Merritt Reservoir with an estimated 169 fish caught. Of that total, 86 fish were harvested and 83 fish were released. The average white bass that was harvested was 15.8 inches, and the largest measured during the survey period was 17 inches. Very few anglers target white bass at Merritt Reservoir, but if you do catch one, the chances of it being qualified for a master angler award are very good.



Smallmouth Bass and Largemouth Bass

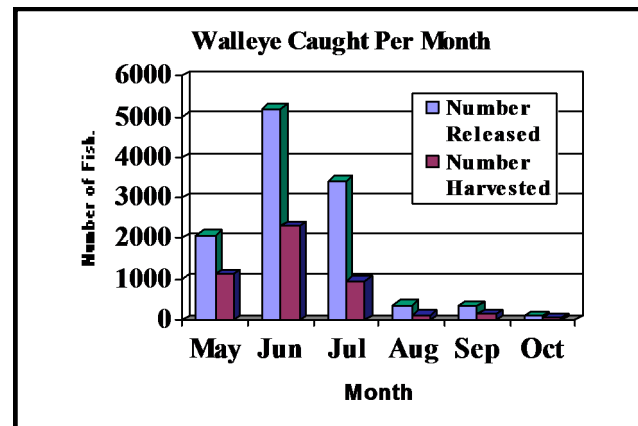
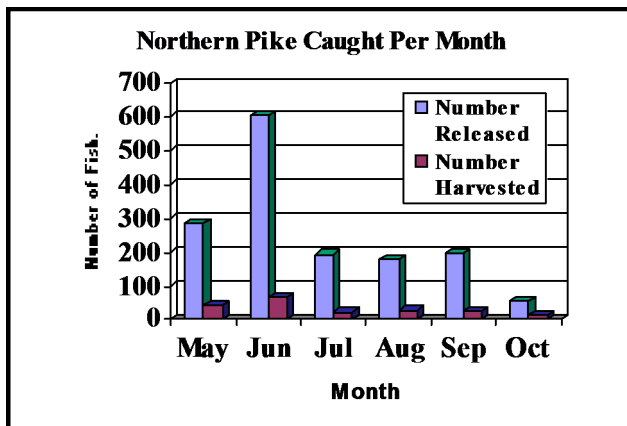
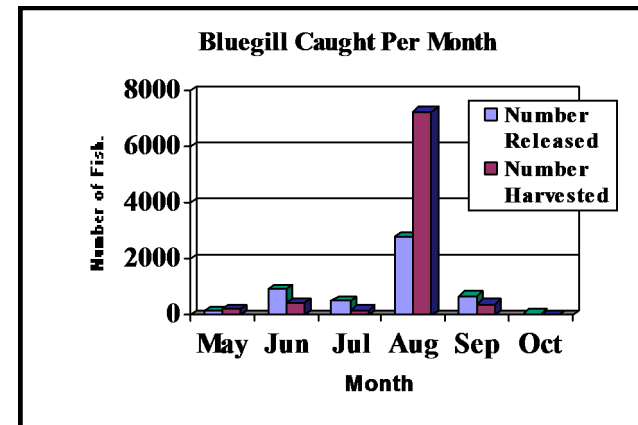
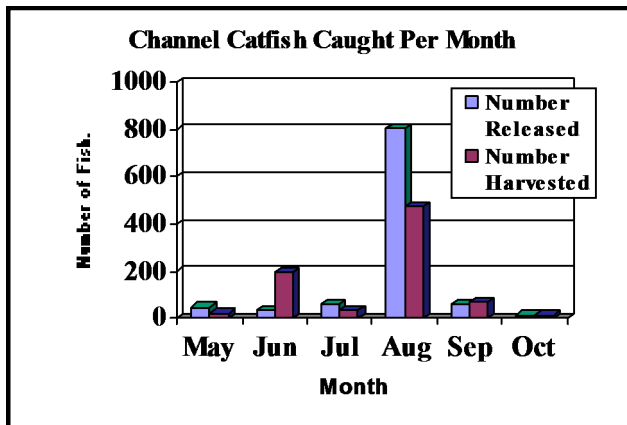
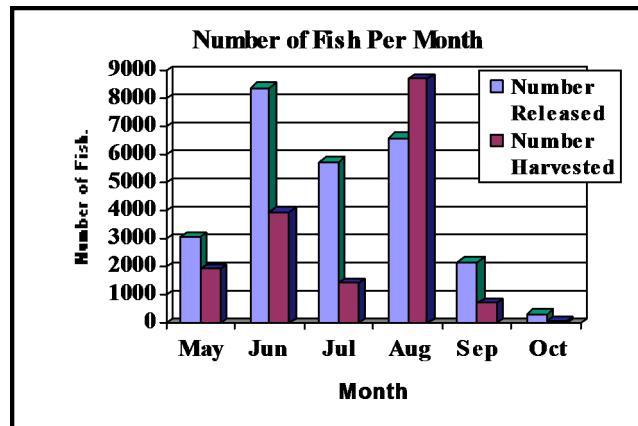
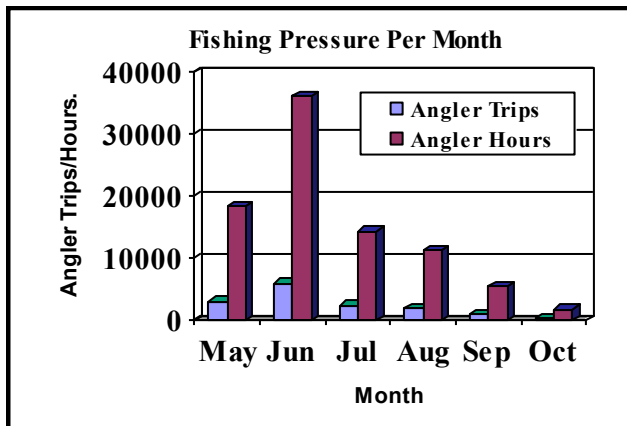
The catch for smallmouth bass remained high for Merritt Reservoir in 2010, however smallmouth bass harvest has continued to decline since 2002. An estimated 882 fish were caught, of which 866 were released and 16 fish harvested. The average size of fish harvested was 13.2 inches. Anglers are reminded there is a statewide minimum of 15 inches for all black bass species.



Estimated total catch for largemouth bass has been similar the past few years. In 2010 the total catch was estimated at 1,634 fish, with 293 harvested and 1,341 released. The average length of harvested largemouth bass was 16.1 inches. Anglers seeking largemouth bass caught 0.57 fish per hour and harvested 0.05 fish per hour.

Merritt Reservoir Monthly Estimates

The following graphs show monthly estimates of fishing pressure and angler catch at Merritt Reservoir in 2010. The highest fishing pressure was seen in June while May, July, and August were relatively consistent and then tapered off in September and October. Anglers had the best fishing success in June and August. Channel catfish and bluegill anglers had their best success in August. Northern pike catch remained consistent throughout the survey period with the best catch in June. Walleye fisherman at Merritt experienced their best success May through July.



For additional information about fisheries management at Merritt Reservoir, contact the following NGPC personnel by phone or email addresses listed below.

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